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LONDON FOR SUTPHIN  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/02  
TAGS: [PTER PHUM CE](#)  
SUBJECT: LTTE MASSACRES 54 CIVILIANS IN EASTERN PROVINCE  
NEAR AMPARA

REF: (A) COLOMBO 2306, (B) COLOMBO 2269

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: THE LTTE ATTACKED SLEEPING VILLAGERS IN GONAGALA DURING EARLY MORNING HOURS OF SEPTEMBER 18, HACKING TO DEATH 54 CIVILIANS INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN. LOCALS HAVE ASSAILED THE GOVERNMENT FOR FAILING TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE SECURITY. ON THE OTHER HAND, TAMILS HAVE CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR ITS ENERGETIC RESPONSE TO THE LTTE ATTACK EVEN AS IT HAS REMAINED SILENT ABOUT THE AIR FORCE'S ACCIDENTAL BOMBING OF TAMIL CIVILIANS IN THE NORTH ON SEPTEMBER 15. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) LTTE CADRES ENTERED THE SINHALESE VILLAGE OF GONAGALA, APPROXIMATELY 13 KILOMETRES NORTH OF AMPARA (NEAR THE DISTRICT BORDER WITH BATTICALOA) IN EASTERN SRI LANKA, BETWEEN 0130 AND 0430 SATURDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 18. REPORTEDLY DRAGGING SOME OF THEIR VICTIMS SLEEPING FROM THEIR BEDS, THE LTTE KILLED 54 CIVILIANS USING LONG KNIVES, SWORDS AND MACHETES. THE VICTIMS INCLUDED 14 CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE, 17 WOMEN AND 23 MEN. THIRTY-EIGHT OTHER PERSONS WERE ALSO INJURED. DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER RATWATTE VISITED THE VILLAGE SATURDAY AFTERNOON AND WAS ACCOSTED BY ANGRY VILLAGERS ASKING, "IS THIS THE SECURITY YOU ARE PROVIDING US?" HE PROMISED TO SEND MORE HOME GUARDS TO THE AREA.

[1](#)3. (C) SECURITY SOURCES TOLD EMBOFF THEY SUSPECTED THE ATTACK WAS THE WORK OF ABOUT 60 LOCAL LTTE CADRES. GIVEN THE LENGTH OF TIME OF THE ATTACK AND GONAGALA'S DISTANCE FROM KNOWN LTTE AREAS OF OPERATION, THEY THINK IT UNLIKELY A STRIKE FORCE CAME DOWN FROM THE UNCLEARED AREA ALONG THE COAST SOUTH OF BATTICALOA FOR THE ATTACK. THE SECURITY FORCES ARE CONTINUING THEIR SEARCH OPERATIONS.

[1](#)4. (U) THE ATTACK WAS WIDELY CONDEMNED. PRESIDENT KUMARATUNGA OFFERED HER CONDOLENCES ("I WAS DEEPLY GRIEVED TO HEAR OF THE DEATHS"), SAYING "ALL CIVILIZED SOCIETIES WOULD, NO DOUBT, DEPLORE CRIMES OF THIS TYPE WITH UTTER CONTEMPT." THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF) AND OTHER TAMIL COMMENTATORS, HOWEVER, CONTRASTED THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT AND OTHER EXPRESSIONS OF GOVERNMENT CONCERN FOR THE VICTIMS (PROMISES OF ASSISTANCE TO THEIR FAMILIES) WITH THE OFFICIAL SILENCE AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 15 AIR FORCE BOMBING OF TAMIL CIVILIANS IN THE NORTH WHERE 22 CIVILIANS WERE KILLED (REF A).

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: MOST OBSERVERS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY SOURCES, VIEW THIS LATEST LTTE OUTRAGE AS DIRECT RETALIATION FOR THE SEPTEMBER 15 BOMBING. WHILE THAT MAY BE TRUE, THE LTTE ACTION DEMONSTRATES ONCE AGAIN ITS ABILITY TO STRIKE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. BY

REVISITING GONAGALA (A SMALL VILLAGE SURROUNDED BY  
TAMIL ONES IN THE JUNGLE WHERE THE LTTE PASSED THROUGH A  
YEAR AGO) FAR AWAY FROM THE FRONT LINES, THE LTTE ALSO  
SPOTLIGHTED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE GOVERNMENT'S SECURITY  
BLANKET IN THE EAST. THIS WILL LIKELY INCREASE PRESSURE  
ON THE GOVERNMENT TO MOVE MORE TROOPS FROM THE NORTH AND  
PERHAPS FROM THE OFFENSIVE LINES TO INCREASE LOCAL  
SECURITY IN THE EAST (REF B). THE WEEKEND PRESS CARRIED  
MANY CRITICAL STORIES OF THE SHORT-LIVED (24 HOURS)  
RECENT OFFENSIVE ("RANA GOSHA V") SUGGESTING IT HAD  
FALLEN SHORT OF ITS OBJECTIVE AND TROOPS HAD RETREATED.  
UNFORTUNATELY, THIS MASSACRE COULD WELL PROVE TO BE THE  
LTTE'S MOST EFFECTIVE WEAPON IN PREVENTING ADDITIONAL  
SUCH OFFENSIVES FROM OCCURRING BEFORE THIS YEAR'S  
MONSOON. END COMMENT.

DONNELLY